

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 9267

EXDIS

FOR ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IN
SUBJ: PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO DESAI

1. WHEN THE PRESIDENT CONSIDERS ANOTHER LETTER TO
PRIME MINISTER DESAI, I MAKE BOLD TO OFFER TWO SUGGES-
TIONS.

2. ONE, THE ISSUE OF NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION SHOULD
BE APPROACHED ON A HIGH MORAL LEVEL. MORARJI SEES THE
MATTER THAT WAY, AND IF INDIA IS TO BE PERSUADED TO BE
SELF-DENYING UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP WITH RESPECT TO THE
NUCLEAR SELF-SUFFICIENCY THAT HAS BEEN ITS GOAL AND IF
IT IS TO BE LED TO ACCEPT FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS, WE
MUST DEMONSTRATE OUR CASE FIRST IN TERMS OF PRINCIPLE
AND ONLY LATER IN ERMS OF PRACTICAL BENEFIT. APAR-
TICULAR PROBLEM HERE IS THAT INDIA, AS A NON-EAPONS
STATE, TENDS TO LOOK SOMEWHAT ASKANCE AT PREACHMENTS
FROM THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS POWERS. I THINK THAT THE PRE-
SIDENT SHOULD RECOGNIZE THE NOT UNJUSTIFIED SENSITIVITY
OF THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT (WHICH HAS REPUDIATED
MRS GANDHI'S TEST) ABOUT BEING ASKED TO TAKE ON SAFE-
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 09267 291413Z

GUARDS OR OTHER RESTRICTIONS WHICH THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS
STATES DON'T THEMSELVES YET FULLY ACCEPT. WHILE DOING
SO, I WOULD HOPE THAT HE MIGHT SEEK TO PERSUADE P.M.
DESAI OF THE IMPORTANCE TO THE WORLD OF INDIA'S TAKING
A POSITION OF MORAL LEAADERSHIP, OF IT SETTING A FINER
EXAMPLE, IN THE INTEREST OF THEIR SHARED ULTIMATE
OBJECTIVE, THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS--WHILE

HE, THE PRESIDENT, WORKS TO SECURE FROM THE RUSSIANS AND THE OTHER NUCLEAR POWERS A COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN AND A STEP-BY-STEP REDUCTION IN NUCLEAR ARMS WITH THAT SAME ULTIMATE AIM IN VIEW.

3. SECOND, IF I UNDERSTAND MY WASHINGTON BRIEFINGS CORRECTLY, A KEY FACTOR IN THE PRESIDENT'S CURRENT NUCLEAR POLICY IS THE PERCEPTION THAT PLUTONIUM-BASED NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY POSES FAR GREATER DANGERS, IS FAR MORE SUBJECTABLE TO MISUSE, THAN ARE MOST EXISTING NUCLEAR FACILITIES. THESE FACTS DO NOT SEEM TO BE SUFFICIENTLY REALIZED HERE. INSTEAD THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION HERE (EXCEPT PERHAPS IN THE MIND OF THE PM HIMSELF) IS ON THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN ENERGY THAT INDIA WISHES TO GAIN THROUGH THE REPROCESSING OF URANIUM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BREEDER REACTORS. I SUGGEST THAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE TO THE WHOLE WORLD OF BETTER PROTECTIONS BEING FOUND BEFORE REPROCESSING AND PLUTONIUM-BASED BREEDER REACTORS BECOME COMMONPLACE. HE WOULD DO WELL TO MAKE CLEAR AGAIN THAT WHAT WE ARE ASKING OF ALL NATIONS (NOT JUST INDIA) WHICH HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP PLUTONIUM USING AND CREATING TECHNOLOGIES IS A TEMPORARY DELAY IN THESE DEVELOPMENTS UNTIL MORE ADEQUATE PROTECTIONS AGAINST THEIR ABUSE HAVE BEEN DEvised. WE ARE NOT ASKING THEM TO TURN THEIR BACKS INDEFINITELY ON THE NUCLEAR SELF-SUFFICIENCY WHICH THEY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NEW DE 09267 291413Z

FEEL THAT THEY MUST ATTAIN. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT WOULD HELP IF WE COULD RECOGNIZE NUCLEAR SELF-SUFFICIENCY AS A LEGITIMATE INDIAN GOAL, AS SOME HAVE SUGGESTED THAT OUR POLICY IS SELFISHLY INTENDED TO MAINTAIN OUR POSITION AS A SUPPLIER.

4. FROM THE WIRELESS FILE WE GATHER THAT, IN THE CASE OF CLINCH RIVER AND A SOUTH CAROLINA REPROCESSING PLANT, THE CONGRESS MAY ALREADY HAVE UNDERCUT OUR ABILITY TO "SELL" THIS SECOND LINE OF ARGUMENT HERE. IF SO, I EXPECT THAT EVEN WERE MORARJI TO BE PERSUADED ON MORAL GROUNDS TO ACCEPT FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS AND ELAY INDIA'S PURSUIT OF PLUTONIUM-BASED NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY, HIS CHANCE OF SELLING THESE STEPS TO HIS COLLEAGUE WOULD NOT BE VERY GOOD. IT WILL BE HARD ENOUGH WITHOUT SUCH IMPED-

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